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zoom

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ANTELOPE CANYON

IN THIS ISSUE: A FAMOUS SLOT CANYON IN ARIZONA

Antelope Canyon (photo © Bozena Pilat)

A FANTASY WORLD OF STONE

The sun shines brightly as you stand at the entrance to Antelope Canyon, one of the most famous slot canyons in the western United States. Antelope Canyon is located along a large wash that drains into Lake Powell, a few miles east of Page, Arizona. While the sky above is cloudless, a storm forms miles away. One lightning bolt strikes, then another, and another. Then a torrential rain starts to pour tons of water. From a distance, it seems like the water is soaking into the ground. But it isn't. There isn't enough soil to absorb the water. Instead, the water disappears into a deep crack in the ground: a "slot" which has been forming for thousands of years. The slot has turned into a meandering canyon. During storms, the canyon immediately fills with swift water that rises higher and higher. Within minutes, the calm and dry canyon can turn into a roaring stream from which there is no escape. Antelope Canyon is accessible by guided tour only. The guides take all possible precaution by monitoring weather forecasts for the area constantly. If a storm is coming, all tourist traffic in the canyon is stopped. Antelope Canyon is a place where the power of nature is never questioned.

A Mystical Place for Its Owners

Antelope Canyon lies in territory that belongs to the Navajo tribe of Native Americans. The Navajo community operates the tour agencies who lead visits to the canyon. They guides highlight the scenic beauty of the canyon, ensure the tourists' safety, and also explain the significance of this and other areas of natural beauty in Native American cultures. "To older

Navajos, entering a place like Antelope Canyon was like entering a cathedral," explains the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation website, which provides an introduction to the history of the canyon.

Origins of the Name

Antelope Canyon got its name from the pronghorn antelopes that once grazed in the area. It consists of



A tour pickup truck of one of the tourist agencies in Page (photo © Bozena Pilat)



Entrance to Upper Antelope Canyon (photo © Bozena Pilat)

two parts: Upper and Lower Antelope Canyon. The Navajo name for the former is Tse' bighanilini, meaning "the place where water runs through rocks." The Navajo name for the latter is Hasdest-wazi, or "spiral rock arches."

City of Churches on Glen Canyon Dam

Most tours start in Page, a city of 9,000 inhabitants in northwestern Arizona whose origins date to 1957. At that time Page was just a housing camp for workers building the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River and their families. The town was named after John C. Page, head of the Reclamation Commission, which constructed the dam. Twelve religious denominations were granted building permits along the main street, Lake Powell Boulevard, and a dozen churches were built one next to the other. This part of the street is now known as "Church Row" by local residents.

Heart of Canyon Country

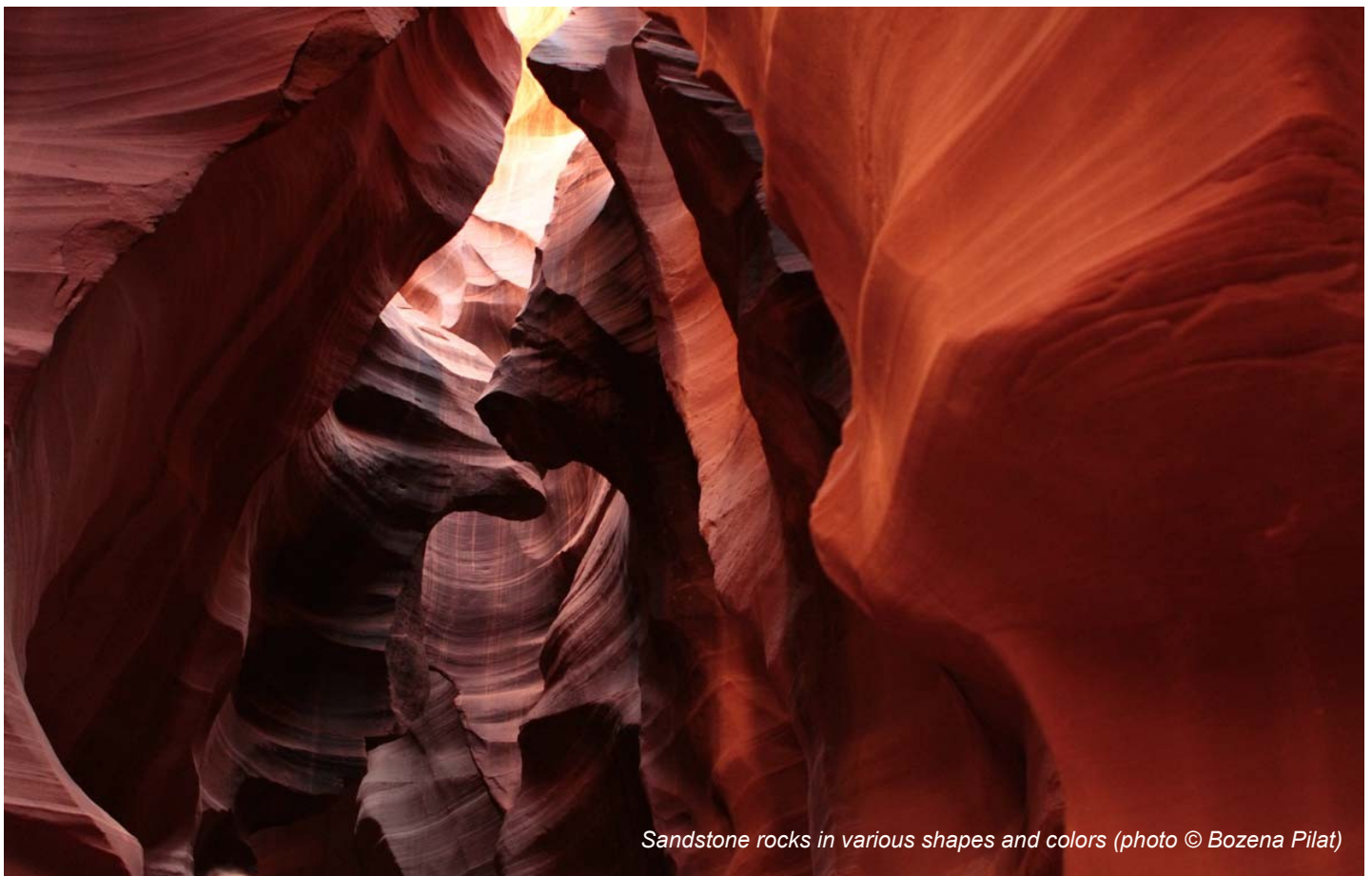
Page and Antelope Canyon are located at the center of "Canyon Country." The city is a short drive from the North and South Rim of the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks, Monument Valley, and Canyon De Chelly. Approximately three million people visit the area each year. Thus

tourism is the basis of the city's economy.

Upper Antelope Canyon – Photographers' Paradise

Most tourists buy a tour of Antelope Canyon. At the time the tour starts they leave their car in a parking lot and get in an open pickup truck for a ride to the canyon. Many of the tourists are keen photographers who have heard about the photogenic qualities of the canyon. They come with their best gear: cameras, lenses, tripods, etc. The drive to the canyon is fast and rugged, so they need to keep good hold of their equipment. There is no road and the last leg of the journey is across an unimaginably rutty stretch of sand. But don't expect the tour guide to slow down. They won't. The pickup ride is an added attraction of the tour.

The light beams that penetrate the floor of Antelope Canyon at different times of the day are particularly attractive for photographers. The light beams reveal a fantasy world of colored stone. The colors change throughout the day depending on the position of the sun. The light is strongest at the slot opening and weakens with every bend and twist along the path



Sandstone rocks in various shapes and colors (photo © Bozena Pilat)

through the canyon. The openings in the top of the canyon are narrow and of irregular shapes. A tripod seems like a must for most pros, but considering heavy tourist traffic, taking photos is always a challenge. Photographers who need more time for their visit can choose a special photographic tour that is offered.

Single Path In and Out

Antelope Canyon is narrow. At some turns it is wide enough for just one person to pass. There is only one way in and out. Once tour groups reach the end of the canyon, they have to turn back and re-trace their steps back to the entrance. During the day, tourists move in both directions. The guides show a lot of talent in safeguarding a smooth passage for their groups. In order to give way to a large group coming from the opposite direction, a guide will sing or play a flute or perform for his group.

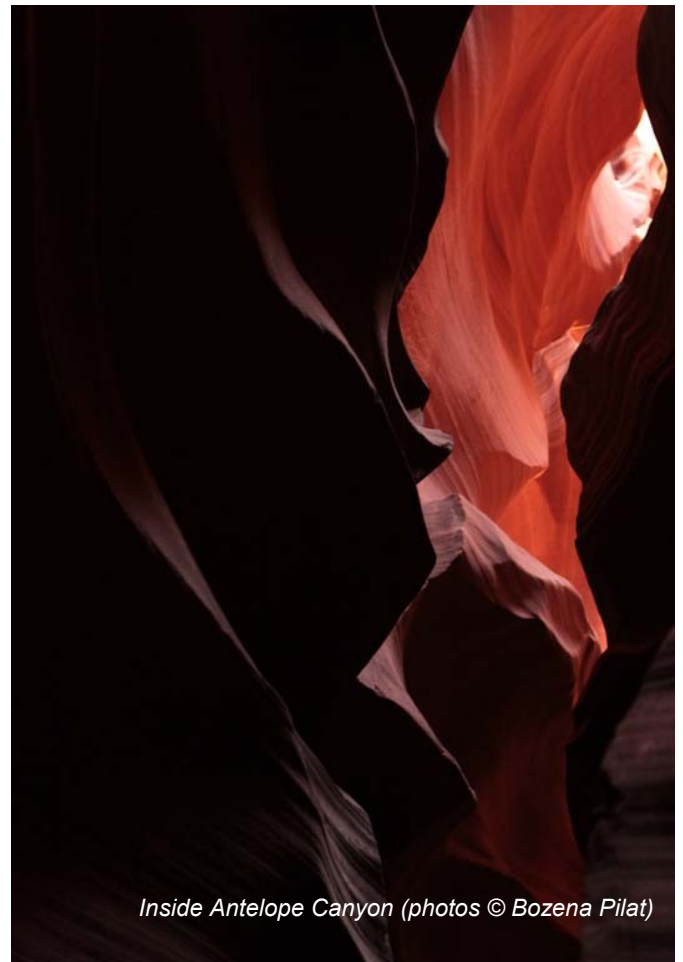
Flash Floods Cut and Scour Slot Canyons

Antelope Canyon and other slot canyons in the area have been formed by the forces of nature. Flash floods make rainwater gather in a basin

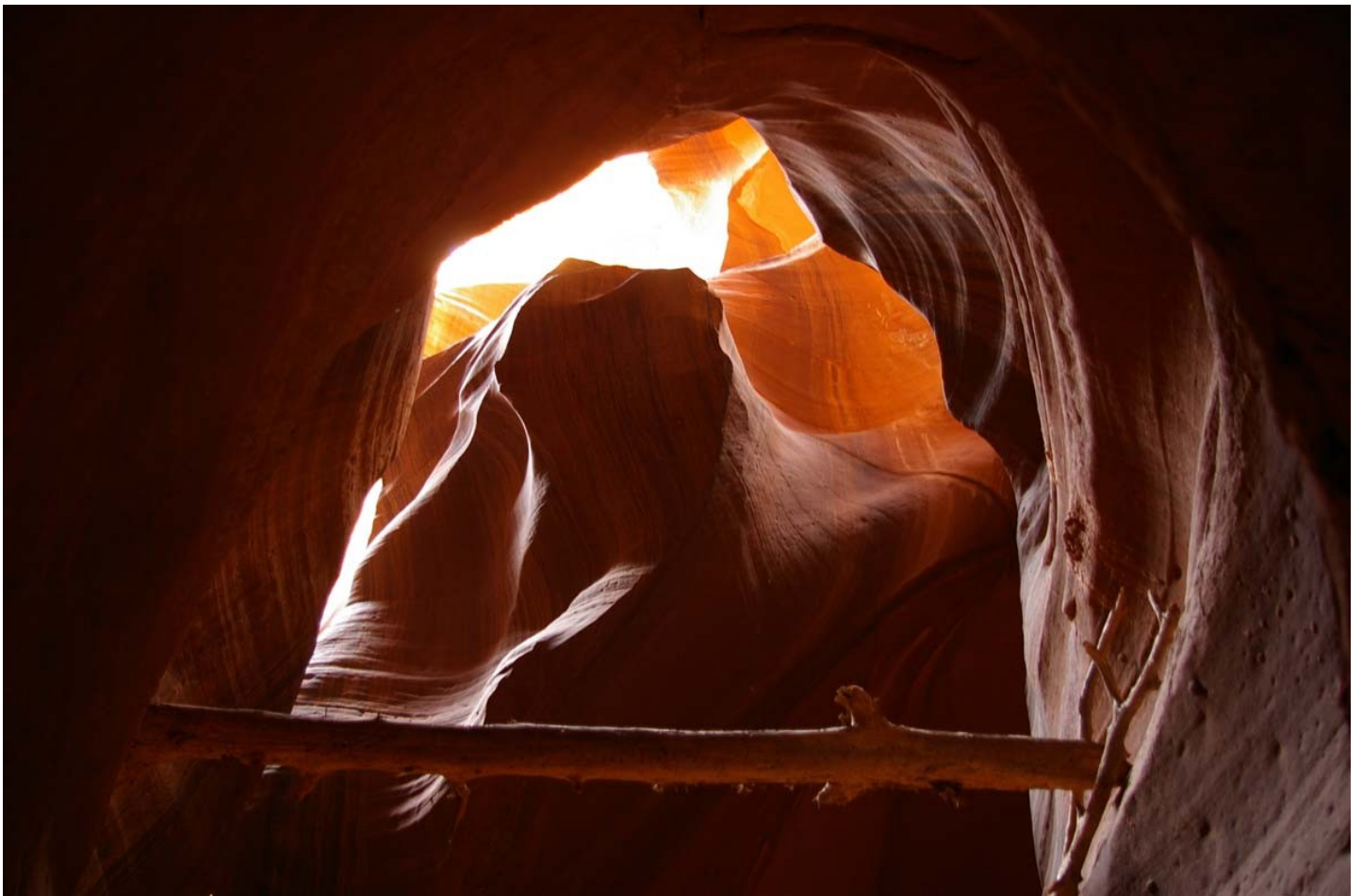
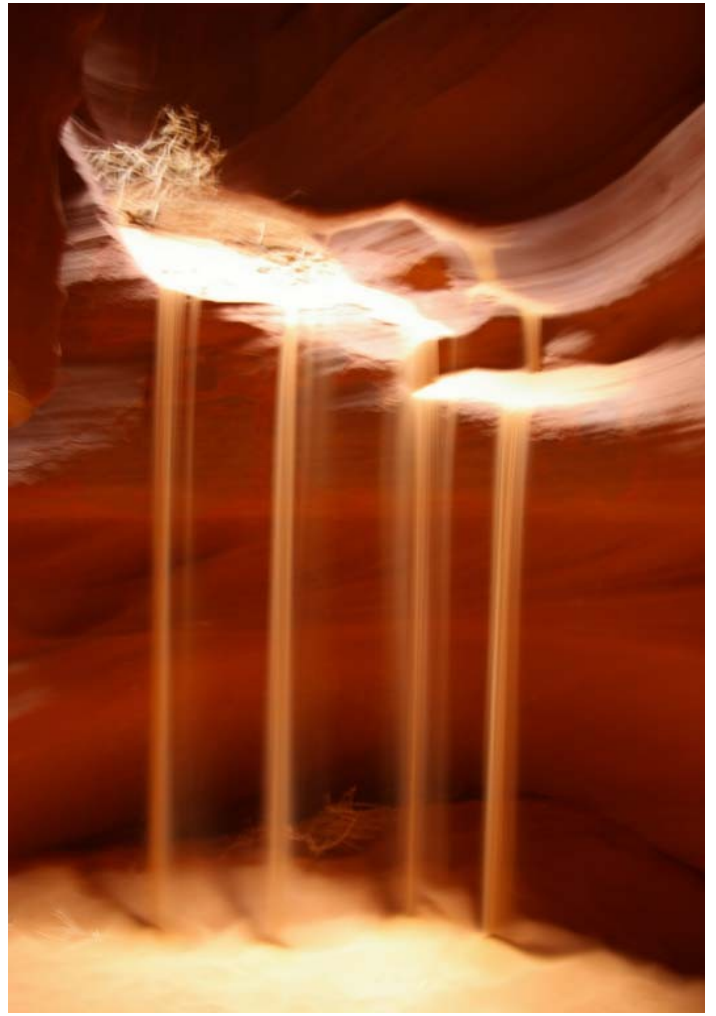
above the canyon. The water gains speed as it rushes through the narrow passages, smoothing the canyon's edges and deepening the crevice. Each flood carries with it a lot of sediment and debris, which is deposited on the canyon bed. Sometimes a flood can cause closure of the canyon for months. This happened in October 2006 when, after a three-day flood, the Tribal Park Authorities had to close Lower Antelope Canyon for five months. A flash flood in 1997 killed 11 tourists. The only survivor was their guide, whose account of the fatal event you can watch at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-QgjNvaflw>

Lower Antelope Canyon

Lower Antelope Canyon is more difficult to access. There is no entrance from the ground level. Visitors must climb down ladders to the canyon floor. This canyon is a little shallower than Upper Antelope Canyon and the famous light beams do not occur there as often as in the other. Yet, it is also very popular with tourists. After the tragedy of 1997, sirens were installed at the entrance to warn visitors in case of a sudden and unexpected storm in the area that could cause a flash flood.



Inside Antelope Canyon (photos © Bozena Pilat)



*(from top clockwise) A Navajo guide performs for his group throwing sand onto a ledge.
The opening in the top of the canyon (photos © Bozena Pilat)*

Activity Page

EXERCISE 1: GRAMMAR

Decide whether the sentences below are true or false:

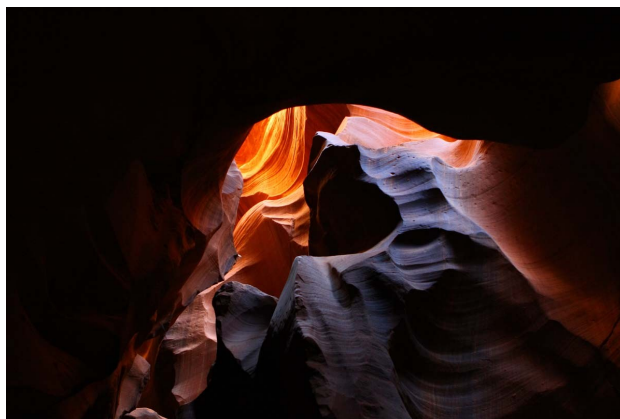
1. The city of Page is the closest town to Antelope Canyon.
2. The canyon lies in the territory owned by the Hopi Tribe of Native Americans.
3. John C. Page was an architect who made a design for Page.
4. Page is located within a few-hour drive from both North and South Rim of the Grand Canyon.
5. Upper Antelope Canyon is famous for light beams.
6. Lower Antelope Canyon is accessible from the ground level.
7. Groups that have walked along Antelope Canyon return via a different route.

EXERCISE 2: SPEAKING

Work in pairs, choose a picture and describe it to your partner. Compare the two pictures and then talk about attractions and dangers of places like Antelope Canyon. Why is this canyon photographers' paradise? What challenges are there for a photographer? Have you visited places of great natural beauty? Which is your favorite one? Tell your partner about them and why they should visit them too.



A rock that resembles a wolf



*Inside Antelope Canyon
(photos © Bozena Piat)*

EXERCISE 3: WRITING

Write a short paragraph about your favorite holiday place. Why have you chosen it? What tourist attractions does it have?

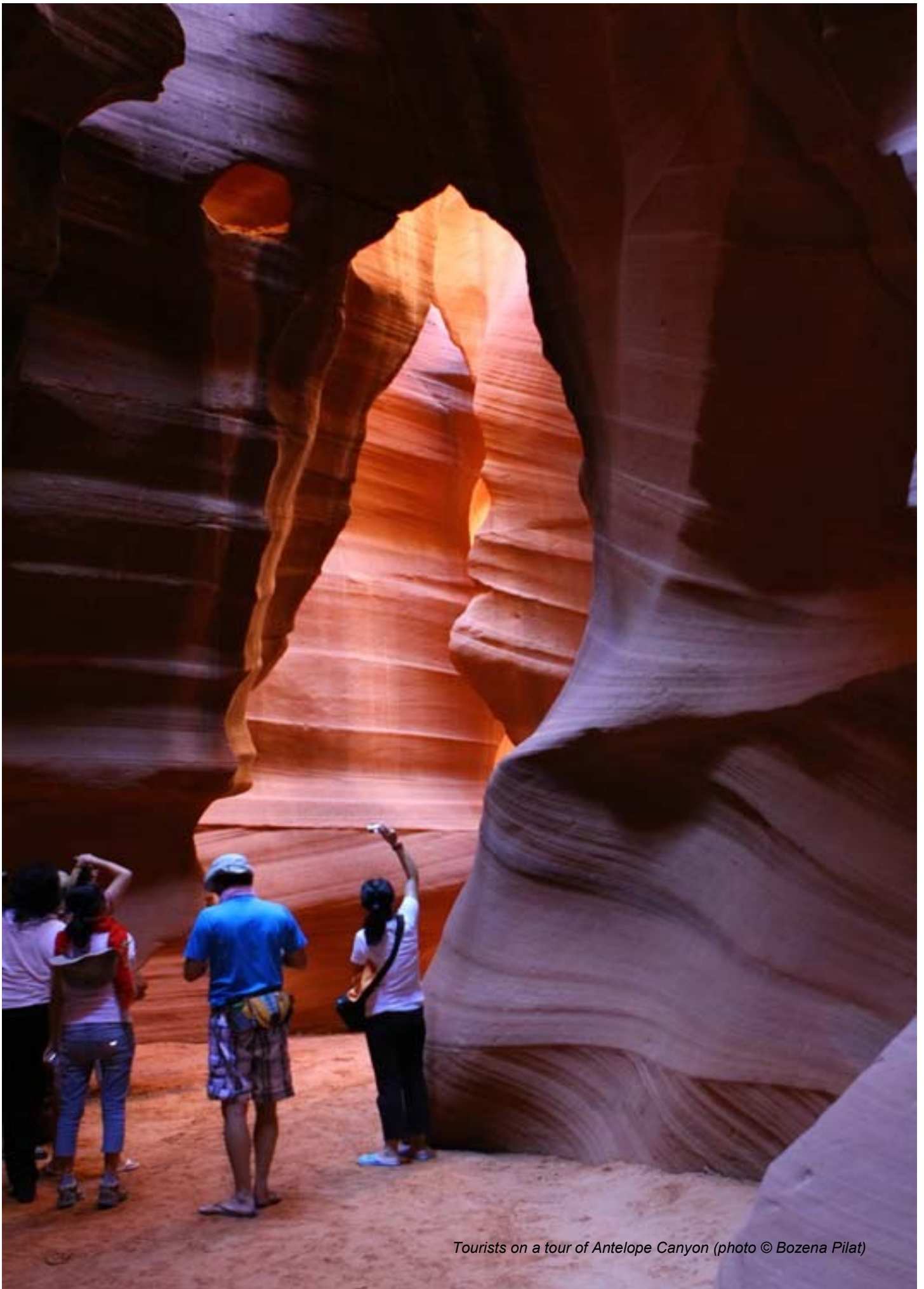
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Tourists on a tour of Antelope Canyon (photo © Bozena Pilat)